

[Compaq]
c:\auto\May72
28 November 1988

Things mentioned on auto tape 1: background to incident of May 3 1972.

--MHH Sept 69: This administration won't leave office without having mined Haiphong (and bombed Hanoi; and invaded Cambodia and Laos? check)

--Evidence: HAK/N response--a restudy--to CIA answers to my NSSM-1 question on this (CIA responding as MHH had predicted, as did other civ agencies, and as did JCS). The CIA negativity on this proposal led HAK to distrust CIA, and to cease turning to them for estimates, relying instead on NSC studies.

--also, secret bombing of Cambodia

--secret threats to SU

--secret opening to China

--Meaning: --Good doctor (JTM and McG B on starting RT, in spring 1965): don't allow right-wing, or your rivals (RFK, in 1965) or your own conscience to charge you with cowardice, unmanliness, indecisiveness, excessive legalism, not caring enough about VN or CW or avoiding defeat, being a quitter or good loser: with not having done everything possible, everything that any adviser (JCS) thought would work or might have a chance, to succeed.

--Actually, good torturer. (Neither kill subject prematurely--as, by destroying all targets ineffectively (like Rosy O'Donnell in Korea), destroying the hostages, destroying the Hanoi donut--not quitting without getting subject to tell or comply, "while strength remains, in you; while not every pain has been inflicted, threat tried or carried out...") (Doctor, as in Dr. Sabati...the torturers of Reza Baraheni in Iran, who insisted on being called "doctor." As in Mengele.)

--N's hopes of coercing SU: revealed to Whalen in 1968. (Not so much mentioned by HRH, in connection with "madman theory", though consistent). Replay Cuba II; confront SU with choice, of humiliation or great risk and defeat...if it doesn't coerce its client NVN.

--Same as Dems wanted to do in 1965, with respect to NVN: get it to call off the NLF.

--(Karp, I read last night, misses this in Indispensable Enemies, as a possibility and thus as a hypothetical objective of LBJ in 1965. (This leaves him with the only aim he can imagine of hitting NVN being to justify a largescale war in SVN..."really facing an external aggressor".

When Karp can imagine only one answer that rationalizes an

action, he concludes that this was the single, sufficient motive; the Sherlock Holmes principle. Invalid.

Likewise, the only reward he can see of invading SVN is to kill reform in the US; this foreseeable effect he can imagine being LBJ's desire (as party oligarch), and he concludes it was LBJ's purpose (despite counter-indications, most of which he ignores: in particular, LBJ's costly effort to conceal the cost of the war as long as possible, prolonging his reform program an extra budget season.)

He ignores the possibility that the President has a personal interest and agenda that differs from the party's (and the rest of the party oligarchs: always against successful governmental action and reforms), just as the party oligarch's interests and agenda differs from the public's, and what they tell the public.

The hypothesis he never considers is that LBJ's domestic agenda may have been--for a change--in line with what the public needed and desired, and what he was saying; thus differing from the long-run interests of the party oligarchs, and specifically of the Bourbons; but that this was second in priority to averting a Cold War failure and losing his job to RFK, his Democratic rival and bete noire (a priority he may have shared with the oligarchs, Cold Warriors, Bourbons, and Establishment in general.)

So he may have accepted, chosen, the foreseeable loss of the Great Society not as a desired end (as Karp infers: and as may have been true of some of his Democratic allies mainly outside the Administration (though few if any seem to have urged him to go that far, given the foreseeable costs of the war: Karp underrates how foreseeable those were, to LBJ and other close advisors, including Clifford and Senatorial friends): not as a desired end but as a Lesser Evil.

Karp simply ignores this possibility, of LBJ wanting above all to keep his job--which would be risked by his failure in Vietnam even though, as Karp says, the public was not currently focussed on Vietnam or independently demanding that he use "any means necessary" to avoid failure there--or his possible desire to (both win a war and) deliver social benefits, like FDR (whom Karp denigrates, as having done more to moderate and limit change and benefits than to deliver; nevertheless, as a model to LBJ, FDR delivered more than hst, JFK or Nixon or Reagan, etc. did!)

LBJ was in a crisis--not economic, like the Depression, but just as explosive, in racial/social terms, when he either had to deliver something, or suffer--what, in the end, he chose to suffer (rather than lose the war). In that crisis, like FDR, he might well have wanted to deliver something, fairly big, even if the Bourbons and party oligarchs were skeptical and worried about any reform.

This would be the role of a party statesman, like FDR surely,

rather than parochial, short-sighted oligarch, like many that FDR surely had to confront in his own party, as well as those backing the Repubs). And LBJ probably saw FDR's actual accomplishments, plausibly, as more positive than Karp rates them; and wanted to provide similar benefits (as in TVA and rural electrification in Texas): even if the party oligarchs feared the future effects of this on their control of the party, after he had left and had assured his place in history.

ANYWAY:

--assumption in 65 that NVN controlled (and operationally directed) the NLF, enough to call it off, if NVN was induced to do so. McN: bombing is "a bargaining chip, something we can stop."

--Likewise, N's belief that SU could call off NVN, which in turn could call off the NLF. And belief that SU might do so, given stick of possible confrontation and carrot of trade and detente and arms control (like LBJ's carrot to NVN in 65: Mekong Basin Development, trade, aid).

--New reason to believe: N's induced rivalry with China. N tells HAK to pursue opening with China on day that SU recognizes PRG (initial coercion--Cambodian bombing and threats--had failed: like combination of Seaborn threats and Tonkin Gulf in 1964: did either HAK or N know of this precedent...of failure?!) (This part of strategy was new, due to Nixon, not HAK).

--So HAK's savage blow in fall of 1969: "You're trying to tell me that..." (actually, Japanese Emperor did have a breaking point, though Japanese public or military did not, and neither Hitler nor Germans did, or reached it). (and DRV did, too, when it came to insisting on its demands of 1969-71 and faced with four more years of bombing). But question: where is it? Ho's willingness to see his people tortured in front of him (like father and child...) had been tested...(I have mixed feelings, in both cases!)

--HAK/N belief that I knew of all this: through MHH (who might have known more than he was supposed to: as in above cases); or Morris, Lake or others; hence, the danger I posed in May 1972.

--What N was facing in May, 1972 in VN: loss of Hue, and of SVN, if both attacks were pressed: unless SU cut off aid and demanded a halt (while B52s were tried out, successfully: by both Vann and in SVN)

--Thus, threats were needed (as MHH and I had supposed in 1969) for defensive reasons, to avoid a loss (not, to win the war, as N/HAK really hoped in 1969).

--we had underestimated the ambition of N/HAK aims in 1969: not knowing of the scale of the bombing of Cambodia, or of the imminence of escalation in the fall of 1969;

--But N faced the loss of the summit, if he mined Haiphong: which threatened his election.

--Recall the poor prospects of election, as of summer 71 or spring 72, in face of Wallace. If Wallace ran as Independent, N might come in third (as he was nearly second in 68. Whereas, he would have won in landslide in 68 if Wallace hadn't run...No? This is never discussed! But Humphry got in 68 what McGovern got in 72, as percentage of total vote; but Wallace kept the votes that he took from the Dems away from the Repubs in 68. N's Southern strategy: to be second to Wallace in hearts of racists; and to persuade or prevent Wallace from running, as in 68, as an Independent (this is never mentioned as part of the Southern strategy. See Evans and Novak).

--Thus, it was very risky to lose the summit. Nevertheless, N chose to take this risk; and without HAK/s proposed hedge, of calling off the summit himself rather than let the Soviets call it off. Why? Because he not only faced a challenge--as he says in his memoirs--but he faced the imminent loss of SVN. This would not be averted simply by mining Haiphong (at the cost of the summit): unless the confrontation with the Soviets and the threat of prolonged bombing and hitting of dikes induced the Soviets to brake the NVNese, and caused the DRV to respond to SU and US pressure, and halt attack.

--Only Haldeman seems to have supported this gamble; also Connolly. Perhaps Mitchell (check), and Haig. But not HAK, or Rogers or Laird.

--On night of May 2! options were discussed on Sequoia: including "Nuclears." (Kalbs book). "Rejected." But was the threat of nuclears rejected? They don't consider; I assume it had already been delivered, the previous week (or, that week?) by HAK (check chronology); and was a factor in causing the actual halt in the offensive. (This hint by Kalbs must be read in light of actual background of N threats, an threats by other Presidents; and (b) the actual context, pressure, N faced; and (c) the existence of nuclear targets--the forces confronting Hue--just as there were newly targets for B52s and for Vann, the Just Warrior, that spring; as there had been around Khe Sanh, tempting Westmoreland in 1968, for both b52s and nuclears).

--again: Hak and N believed I knew all this, and might have documents. They also believed I was coming to Washington: before I knew it. (And I did try to put out documents--as I had already started to do, with Gravel, and was being blocked! So they knew not only that I had documents and might have more, and might put them out; they knew that the time had arrived, and that I was trying to put out what I had... So the orders went out to Miami...

--So when Cora Weiss called and said Haiphong was being bombed: I "knew" what was coming in the next few days. What I had been trying to avert for eight years, (and did avert, wrt Haiphong

7 years earlier: my study for McNamara), and in particular since fall 1969, 2-1/2 years earlier, six months after they planned it). (I also wanted to avert invasion of NVN--less likely since spring 71--and use of nuclears (which was now an immediate possibility, though I didn't know it, and though HAK probably thought I did).

--I didn't know of N's hope that this would coerce the Soviets into coercing the North, i.e. that the mining itself would have an important "diplomatic" effect (even though no significant physical effect on supplies: this is what revelation of NSSM-1 could reveal, raising the question of the real purpose, which N preferred not to disclose, since it was a "questionable" justification for an act of war).

What I foresaw as the major aim was that the mining would provide an excuse and a cover for the renewal of heavy bombing of the North, probably with B52s, perhaps against population centers; and perhaps hitting the dikes. JTM had proposed study of the dikes in 1966--shamefully, dismayingly--with its possibility of one million casualties from flooding and famine: showing how far a Harvard professor was prepared to go, in studying options at least, for the slender objectives at stake...

Just as McGeorge Bundy had showed how far a Harvard dean would go (or as Conant had shown, in the Interim Committee in 1945) for the slender advantages of being a Good Doctor, for image at home and abroad... (N, in May 1972, wasn't just being a Good Doctor, as we had feared in 1969 he would attempt before his term ended, foreseeably, in stalemate or defeat; he was now trying desperately to forestall imminent defeat in SVN: a CW defeat that overshadowed, even, his needs to win the election or to have a summit).

--I knew this would not win, or end war. And it would not have been justified even if it might do that. Nor did I see any way to stop it. But now it was time for me to be a Good Doctor; I couldn't bear to see that happen without my having done everything to try to stop it. So I told Cora I would do what I had earlier rejected: because it interfered with my book and out of an earlier sense of feeling like a fool at rallies, a sense of uselessness. The rally scheduled for May 3 looked to me like the Last Rally--certainly, the last before escalation. (Why did I think of it as the Last Rally? Because after the escalation I expected, rallied would look useless to everyone?) I didn't want to miss it.